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Who is to Blame?

James 1:13-18

Part Four

We have been enjoying, I hope, a very profitable study in the Book of James. The theme of this epistle is, “tests of living faith.” This epistle was written to help us know whether or not we are a part of God’s family or not a part of God’s family. It was written to help us know whether we are truly saved or not saved.

The very first test that we considered was the “response to trials” test. The proper response to trials is found in **VV. 2-12**. The improper response to trials is found in **VV. 13-18**. The proper response to various trials and difficulties that come into our lives is perseverance. And of course the improper response to trials would be a lack of perseverance.

If we persevere we will continue to manifest a love for God even in the midst of the most difficult of circumstances. If we fail to persevere we will not manifest a love for God in the midst of our trials but rather we will allow our natural, healthy, God given desires to be baited and will succumb to the temptations of our flesh.

If this happens we must not point the finger of blame at anyone or anything else other than our own lusts. If we do this we will ultimately be implicating God for God is the one who is ultimately responsible for directly or indirectly bringing all that we experience into our lives. James is so concerned that we would do this he gives to us five different proofs to show that it is impossible to think that God could be in anyway implicated in our moral failure.

The first proof is the NATURE OF EVIL. Look at **V. 13**, “**Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He himself does not tempt anyone.**” What do we learn about evil in this verse? “**Evil cannot tempt God.**” Just as darkness cannot effect light evil cannot effect God. The Bible teaches us that God is perfectly separated from sin. Therefore evil cannot tempt God and neither will God tempt others to evil.

The second proof is the NATURE OF MAN. Look at **V. 14** “**But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.**” The world is full of traps and snares that have been baited by Satan. The nature of man is such that our natural healthy desires when baited can be stirred up to lust after that which is forbidden.

The third proof is the NATURE OF LUST. Look at **VV. 15-16**, “**Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. (16) Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.**” Most people think of sin as a solitary act. But sin truly is a process which James illustrates by using the picture of childbirth. And nowhere in this process is God involved.

The fourth proof is the NATURE OF GOD. Look at **V. 17**, “**Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow.**” The only source of good and perfect gifts is God. And God being good can only give good and perfect gifts.

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Any thought that God could be involved in any way in our evil choices is totally unthinkable.

We need to know beyond a shadow of doubt that our evil choices has nothing to do with God and has everything to do with us. If we respond improperly to the circumstances that we have been placed in, it is our fault. In attempting to help us respond better to the circumstances that we have been placed in we need to learn to walk by faith.

There are certain things that we can count on or in other words we know to be true and one of them is the goodness of God which we alluded to in **V. 17**. Another truth we can count on is the justice of God which we see alluded to in **VV. 15-16**. When Satan is baiting us with some sort of temptation we must avoid focusing on the bait whatever that bait might be. Rather we must focus on what we know to be true or in other words we need to walk by faith.

So if a young Christian man finds himself alone with a young lady whom he likes, and finds himself in a position to choose whether or not he wants to express his affection for this young woman in a sexual way he needs to at that moment do what we have been encouraging. He needs to stop focusing on his opportunity to become sexually involved with a young lady that he likes, which is the bait. And rather choose to focus on the truth of God's Word. He needs to focus on the justice of God realizing that God will not be mocked. And he needs to focus on the goodness of God realizing that he will be abundantly blessed for his obedience. If a young man will do this he will find that he will be able to keep his natural, healthy, God-given desires in check. He will be able to quickly take himself and as well the young lady to a place of greater safety.

We can certainly do a lot better in the area of our personal walk if we would continue to practice these things but if we do fail. We need to know that God has nothing to do with it at all. And James is going to give to us one final proof.

THE NATURE OF REGENERATION

Let us read **V. 18**, **“In the exercise of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.”** I don't know what you think of when you think of “good things” and those “perfect gifts” that come down from above but there is no doubt what comes to the mind of James. He thinks about the gift of REGENERATION.

“Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift comes from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. (18) In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.” When we complete our study of the topic of regeneration as we find it in this verse I believe that we will see clearly why it is impossible to accuse God of being involved in any way with our improper responses to life. Though we will see this clearly in the end of this examination we will only begin to explore this area this morning.

We see the subject of “regeneration” introduced with the words, **“In the exercise of His will He brought us forth.”** In the KJV it says, **“Of His own will begat He us.....”** In the NIV it says, **“He chose to give us birth.”** James is speaking about spiritual birth. Spiritual birth or regeneration is when we pass from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive.

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There are very likely people in this room today who may be physically alive and breathing but yet are spiritually dead and need to be **“brought forth.”** There are very likely people in this room today who may be physically alive and whose hearts may be beating but who need a spiritual **“birth.”**

Jesus in **John 3** attempts to explain this to a man named Nicodemus. It says, **“Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. (2) this man came to Him by night, and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with Him.”** Nicodemus appears to have been attracted to Jesus because of the miracles Jesus did and Nicodemus wanted to know more about Jesus and the doctrines that He taught.

After Nicodemus’ initial greeting and before he even asked a question it says in **V. 3** that Jesus answered him. **V.3, “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”**

Apparently in spite of the fact that he was a Pharisee, which meant that he lived by the strictest possible religious rules, and that he may have been the most learned of all Jewish teachers, which is implied in **V. 10** when Jesus refers to him as **“the teacher of Israel,”** and even in spite of all this there was a void in his life that Jesus knew Nicodemus was attempting to fill through his ethics, morals and knowledge. Nicodemus may not have been consciously aware of this problem but Jesus was. Jesus knew that Nicodemus had chosen the broad path of good works to try and meet the spiritual needs in his life and not only would this path lead to futility but ultimately according to **Matt. 7:13-14** it would lead to destruction.

So rather than responding to any questions that Nicodemus might have initially asked, Jesus goes right for the heart of the matter. Nicodemus even thought he was a religious man, an ethical man, a sincere man but he was a dead man. **Rom. 5:12** makes this very clear, **“Therefore, just as through one man (Adam) sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men.”** This is not speaking of physical death obviously this is talking about spiritual death. Those who are physically alive but spiritually dead can relate to one another in a meaningful way even in a pleasing way but they will not be able to relate to God in a meaningful or in pleasing way. And this is true of how many men? ALL MEN! When we are born into this world we are born spiritually dead. And this will remain this way no matter what we do.

Is. 64:6 makes this very clear, **“we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”** All the good things that Nicodemus had done, no matter how well intended, would be like filthy rags as long as he remained spiritually dead. And therefore no matter how ethical, moral or knowledgeable he might become through his own efforts he would remain forever dead as long as it depended upon him. He would be unable to relate to God or do anything pleasing to God.

What a horrible way to live. People who are dead are building a house of cards. There is no substance and there is no strength. No matter how much they might want there to be. There is one.

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And this was true of Nicodemus. Jesus knew this and he seeks to minister to him. Look at **V. 5**, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”**

Now what do you think Jesus meant by what he said? A better question would actually be, “What did Nicodemus think Jesus meant by what he said? Remember that Nicodemus was **“the teacher of Israel”** and therefore would be very familiar with OT Scriptures. I believe that the passage Nicodemus immediately would think of would be a passage from **Ezek. 36:22-31**. This passage is speaking of the future conversion of Israel. But I believe that Jesus is taking the truth concerning the future conversion of Israel and applying it to the conversion of Nicodemus.

In **Ezek. 36:25** it says, **“Then I (God) will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.”** Then in **V. 27** it says, **“I (God) will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes.”** God in bringing about the future conversion of Israel is going to do two things. He is going to purify them which he refers to as **“sprinkling with water”** and He is going to put His **“Spirit”** within them. This is also true of Nicodemus. If Nicodemus was going to pass from death to life he needed to be “purified” or, in other words, he needed to be “born of water” and he needed to “receive the Spirit” or in other words he needs to be “born of the Spirit.” And in both of these cases just as with our own birth it would have nothing to do with Nicodemus but everything to do with God.

But how will God accomplish this work? How is God going to purify us and place His Spirit within us? What does the verse tell us? Let us look again at **V. 18**, **“In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth.”** But what truth? The truth of the Gospel. **Romans 1:16** makes this very clear, **“I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the POWER OF GOD for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”** There is only one means that God uses to bring a spiritual birth and that is the Word of truth or more specifically the Gospel of Christ.

We must come to the place in our lives where we embrace the following truths which comprise Christ’s gospel: That Jesus is the Son of God, that He came to this earth and died for our sins according to the Scriptures and was buried and yet on the third day rose again. If we desire to turn from living our lives for ourselves and would choose to live our lives for the One who died and rose again on our behalf we will in fact pass from death to life.

This is what Jesus meant when Jesus said to Nicodemus in **V. 16** **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever BELIEVETH IN HIM SHALL not perish but have everlasting life.”**

CONCLUSION

Men are born into this world spiritually dead. And the lives of those who are spiritually dead are like a house of cards they have no content and no strength and will one day experience eternal destruction. But God in His goodness is offering anyone who has ears the gift of salvation.

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And if we would choose to take it by faith will experience lives that will leave us fully satisfied and expectant of future glory.

If you are here this morning and you know that you are still dead in your trespasses and sins. You know your life remains self absorbed and self serving and you want to be set free from the futility of it all. Then it all depends on what you will do with Jesus.

Years ago, there was a very wealthy man who, with his devoted young son, shared a passion for art collecting. Together they traveled around the world, adding only the finest art treasures to their collection. Priceless works by Picasso, Van Gogh, Monet and many others adorned the walls of the family estate.

As winter approached, war engulfed the nation, and the young man left to serve his country. After only a few weeks, his father received a telegram. His beloved son was missing in action.

The art collector anxiously awaited more news, fearing he would never see his son again. Within days, his fears were confirmed. The young man had died while rushing a fellow soldier to a medic.

Distraught and lonely, the old man faced the upcoming Christmas holidays with anguish and sadness. The joy of the season, a season that he and his son had so looked forward to would visit his house no longer.

On Christmas morning, a knock on the door awakened the depressed old man. As he walked to the door, the masterpieces of art on the walls only reminded him that his son was not coming home. As he opened the door, he was greeted by a soldier with a large package in his hand. He introduced himself to the man by saying, “I was a friend of your son. I was the one he was rescuing when he died. May I come in for a few moments? I have something to show you.”

As the two began to talk, the soldier told of how the man’s son had told everyone of his father’s love of find art. “I’m an artist,” said the soldier, “and I want to give you this.”

As the old man unwrapped the package, the paper gave way to reveal a portrait of the man’s son. Though the world would never consider it the work of a genius, the painting featured the young man’s face in striking detail. Overcome with emotion, the man thanked the soldier, promising to hang the picture above the fireplace.

A few hours later, after the soldier had departed, the old man set about his task. True to his word, the painting went above the fireplace, pushing aside millions of dollars of paintings.

And then the man sat in his chair and spent Christmas gazing at the gift he had been given. It soon became his most prized possession, far eclipsing any interest in the pieces for which museums around the world clamored. He told his neighbors it was the greatest gift he had ever received.

The following spring, the old man became ill and passed away. The art world was in anticipation. With the collectors’ passing, and his only son dead, those paintings would be sold at an auction. At his request, the auction was to be held on Christmas day.

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The day arrived and art collectors from around the world gathered to bid on some of the world's most spectacular paintings. Dreams would be fulfilled this day; greatness would be achieved as many would claim "I have the greatest collection."

The auction began with a painting that was not on any museum's list. It was the painting of the man's son. The auctioneer asked for an opening bid. The room was silent. "Who will open the bidding with \$100?" he asked. Minutes passed. no one spoke.

From the back of the room came, "Who cares about that painting? It's just a picture of his son. And not a very good one at that. Let us go on to the other pictures.

More voices echoes in agreement. "No, we have to sell this one first," replied the auctioneer. "NOW WHO WILL TAKE THE SON?" Finally a friend of the old man spoke. "Will you take ten dollars for the painting? That's all I have. I knew the boy, so I'd like to have it."

"I have ten dollars will anyone go higher?" called the auctioneer. After more silence, the auctioneer said, "Going once, going twice. Gone." The gavel fell. Cheers filled the room from those who felt that the bidding would then be able to continue. But the auctioneer looked at the audience and announced the auction was over. Stunned disbelief quieted the room.

Someone spoke up and asked, "What do you mean it's over? We didn't come here for a picture of some old guy's son. What about all of the other paintings? There are millions of dollars of art here!

The auctioneer replied, "Its very simple. According to the will of the father, whoever takes the son gets it all."